



The Muslim Midwives of Mindanao: Entrepreneurs of Health and Peace

Community service comes naturally for Noria Pakung, a 46-year old midwife from Datu Paglas, Maguindanao. She was among those selected for training by the USAID-supported Well-Family Midwife Clinic (WFMC) network.

Since putting up her own clinic in 2000, Noria services at least 12 patients a day, most of whom are Muslim farmers from remote barrios. *"The nearest hospital is a few kilometers away, so the community really depends on me for normal child delivery, pre-natal care and family planning. I am on call 24 hours a day,"* recounts Noria.



Educating her patients on the importance of family planning is on top of Noria's priorities. *"I noticed that one of the roots of poverty here is the huge size of the families. I help them realize that fewer children can mean a better quality of life,"* she explains debunking the misconception that Filipino Muslims are too conservative to tackle family planning issues.

In the frontline of community health care, WFMC midwives developed not just as competent health providers but as capable entrepreneurs improving their own social status. She earns a monthly gross income of US\$900 — five times higher than what she used to earn in her previous job. Her earnings enabled her to have her house renovated, buy a motorcycle and livestock, and support not just her immediate

family but also her clan. More significantly, she was also able to build a mosque near her clinic for her husband, an *imam* or religious leader.



Well-Family Midwife Clinics

are midwife-owned and managed providing family planning and maternal and child health services. There are now 217 clinics, thirty percent (30%) of which are in ARMM, reaching 425,000 clients nationwide. Through trainings, selected midwives were developed not just as competent health care providers but also as able entrepreneurs managing sustainable franchise-type clinics. In 1997, John Snow, Inc., in partnership with 8 NGOs, started the process that made WFMCs the respected institutions that they are today.



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Like Noria, Papala Mayo, 39 years old, has always cared for the health of her Maranao community in Balo-i, Lanao del Norte having served as a Rural Health Midwife for 17 years. Since 2001, Papala is one of seven Muslim midwives managing her own WFMC in the conflict-ridden Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Whole families, engaged in agriculture and trading, come to her clinic for basic maternal and child health services including family planning. Papala services at least 10 clients a day which earns for her US\$ 280-US\$680 a month.

Being neighborhood clinics, WFMCs enjoy a high level of support and acceptance because their tailor-made health services fit particular cultural and religious nuances of their communities. Maranaos, for instance, take it *"as a matter of pride to be able to pay for their basic needs, including health services,"* Papala shares.

Well-Family Midwife Clinics (WFMCs) do not just address the basic health needs of communities. Midwives under the program are recognized and given entrepreneurial opportunities especially in the Philippines where women health care providers migrate abroad just to make a more decent living. Through the WFMCs, midwives claim their rightful place as agents of health, and also ultimately of peace and economic development.

